

LIGHT IN ASHES,
OR THE SECOND LIFE OF FIRE

A POEM

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LIGHT IN ASHES, OR THE SECOND LIFE OF FIRE

I

Where there was part of you, your breath let's say
clouding up the window in the school room
when everybody else had gone outside,
and yet within that oval of breath steam
already you could see a shrinking at the edges and a
bleeding through
of what had been behind, as if the peripheral
should slide back in toward center, having been
banished
by, incredibly, a mere breath from your open mouth
out of which there hadn't come the slightest sound -

-
astonishing. It really was astonishing, it's true.
(I'm told that means to turn someone to stone.)
You were quite still for just a moment.
Or was it rather that you could have moved
and everybody else was frozen stiff?
Yet they were still outside. Did they stand there
blankly,
maybe even all chalk white,
like the people in those things by what's his name?
Or were they really moving after all?
And what were they really doing, what were they
seeing,
hearing, touching? Yes, and all
outside that one small room, outside of you.

This was the part you had been missing all along,
and still are even now. So where there was this part,
there now will be the whole. That's the kind of
operation
that we're running here, just so you understand
(charmed words I know, impossible ones too,
implausible at any rate) how everything proceeds,
and must:
the gatherings at midnight, shudderings at daybreak,
the midday glory pouring out its light ecstatically
toward empty space where we had taken up
our postures of restraint, abandonment, and pain,
some on their knees, or on all fours, others running
frantically in horror or in fear. No, they would not
be
the sacrificial victim, the elect, or else we all would
be,
the knife of black obsidian
hanging invisibly above us by a thread.
And even now in the draped and muffled
exchanges
hidden in the dark recesses of the mirror,
that glimmering spot of oil right before the light's
turned on,
just before the painter takes his brush away,
the merely actual and imaged fusing for just one
instant,
in a single pole between brush tip and cloth
with just a thread of paint connecting them,
as summer lightning connects the sky to the earth --
yes, even in those flows and hurryings, delays,
that mark your entrance into day
and wandering adulthood, ushering your breath
into one corner of it all -- this room that opens
outward
all around the beating mind (my god,

how she was screaming -- and the blood)
then drawing everything back after them toward
night,
even in these there still remains the lost, the always
unknown,
the perennially sought. Is this the whole,
or is it only part? And is it really you there after all?

--

just like a photograph, nothing fancy, just a quick
snapshot.
Was this what they were thinking when they did the
deed
that afterward could never be undone --
conception, childbirth, then circumcision (de
rigueur),
and all those other things? But this, though,
isn't really the important list. It isn't even real, you
know,
it's fake. The actual itinerary, the syllabus of loss,
is hidden just behind the square green shade
that hangs there in the dark and quiet room,
trimmed by the thin slice of lilac-colored light that
visits you
in the early early hours when everything's worn off.
Or else it's hidden underneath the teacher's skirt.
Go in right now, crawl in right under there and take
a peek.
You never know what you might find, or not.
And is it really true a thought which seeks
to know the world free of all constructs, without
categories
and without mediation, must be an intuitive thought,
the glass itself discarded for the moment,
for the event come forth ? For in this way
you see the onion skin in layer after layer --

a fluid medium, like the tears that have been trapped
inside of it,
yellow like a parchment or cheese rind --
composed of fiber optic threads, ply after ply
stripped off before the light suffused with it,
there between your thumb and fingers, which still
retain
-- here too -- a scent long afterward, undetectable
perhaps
and yet still there, like the aura of the present
penetrating toward some future state.
As I was saying then, where there was part of you
there now will be a whole. This won't solve
anything, of course,
(as though you needed to be told). The moth of light
inhabiting that corner of the darkened room,
lured by the anti-candle of darkness shedding anti-
light,
will follow out the film of rising smoke not there
into a different realm, where you have never been,
nor I myself, and yet I think I know you from
somewhere
and if I'm not mistaken that must be the place,
that fissure hanging in the air
above the moment flooded with the memory
of that entire universe just passed,
the opening notch between the night and day.
That's where I saw you once or twice before.
I wondered if that was you.
And now that's where it wants to go;
it drifts and climbs just as my voice must do,
rising in the tide of exaltation as I speak.
Black soot like burning plastic
are its artificial wings, the calculus of reason is its
flight,
the dark penumbra of the street its labyrinth.

The moth is just an image of the soul.
Maybe you have your own, I know,
I used to have one too, but somehow something
happened
and then another thing, and now I just can't find it
anywhere.
Shut them in the cellar and they grow more full.
The roots reach down a bit, eyes search and crawl.
I think that if she treats all her prisoners this way
she doesn't deserve to have any, that's what I think.
Through that faint L of golden light, a conic section
seeded with blue motes of dust and silvery straw
hairs,
the solid bricks of night, the prison wall, pour out
their fatal leak, as blue as milk beneath florescent
moons.
Your cup is fallen near your chain, the twisted links
of rib cage, femur, tibia, are difficult to twist into a
key.
It sometimes works, it often won't -- the key, that
is.
There's others that will twist it if you can't.
Yet if the cup is raised up to the light and filled
the water flows into the metal hollow once again,
the metal, like a culvert in the driest river beds
there in deep Los Angeles where the light is like a
blade and yet unseen,
flowing and foaming then, and everything
streams inside of you once more, your skin, revived,
is like a fragile barrier, a borderline to bar the way
against invasion from the depths -- your viscera,
let's say --
into your real life, the life that storms outside of
you,
the others, and the open, and the day itself.
That's the true you, that absence of the you.

You know this now. You see it all so clearly there.
The outer is the inner; the inner, alien.
Your home is elsewhere, here but never here.
We feel the multiplicity of voices
which yet must speak the single multiple *to be*.
The vibratory daybreak round each single instant of
the light,
the schizophrenic calmness that is kept inside of
you,
the markings of the sensed, unknowable invisibility,
the memory of pasts, previsions of all futures,
the constant fissioning of substance,
the storming of existence through itself.
Then it was true the moth had come at last,
filtered through the walls themselves
like wing shapes of blood blooming through a
soaked bandage.
Its wings will fold you round -- cocoon of
breathing, beating light,
veined with the rivers of the blue green earth,
leaves fallen from the sun-filled trees, burnt orange
and crimson,
lime green and dusty pink eaten with moth holes
where the early frost had burned.
Now breathe the scent of hay built into stacks
and carted to the amber barns; the dark creek
flowing
toward the mill descends in rainy silver falls,
carries its lily pads of leaves down flows of mercury
into the foaming sluice; then the rush out into the
steady stream, the slow outspread
that meets the orchard filled with light and golden
wasps alighting
near the mashed and littered windfalls
scattered on the ground; all around are light-filled
trees,

the cider pressing honey-colored juice, the wide
deep stillness
of the harvest and the fall, the warm clear air.
Then bright suffusing sunset with its night-spread
wings,
low blades of slate-dark clouds, the eye blink
closing on the grated coals
as though on other sunsets in memory.
And yet it may be other memories that fold down
over you
as you lie there in the tent-like green,
the shadow of tree branches veining darkly through
the airy skin,
a kind of lung that blooms there, flower-like;
the breathing outward into space and time and
night
will draw in other worlds that flow among us
silently like drafts,
sifting down like sand, like pollen littering the
flower petals.
Sense of the night will infiltrate the khaki dusk,
and then the full obscurity, a special sense,
the seventh and last seal on the form you have and
make,
your special and peculiar share, the
incommensurable,
the sense of distances, of spaces held within
and opening inside to other populations, other paths
not taken in the founding gatherings, the anabasis
or first contact of the envoys, heralds with
exploratory steps,
the paths of morning leading quickly to the twilight
beach
where shore line wavers into surf
and endlessly dissolving chains of foam,

then confused callings in the dark of violent
emergency,
gathering of chaos amid clashing waves, the sense
of night.

There is an unformed and nocturnal space
which yet is that by which we see,
by which we always and must see;
it harbors a swarming, a constant crowding
of the stuff of darkness, menacing, insinuating.
It is filled with itself, although still empty,
vacant of all character although still threatening;
the undetermined fault, the rumor and the
whispering of horror.

It is here you come upon your other self,
the true one that you shut away, the sense of night:
there in the closet you see him standing
amid old suits like hanging files, your other
and preposterous embodiments, let's see
I haven't worn that old one in a while,
hey look remember that tie,
and there's that Christmas present from aunt Jane,
oh yes that was the thing that what's her name gave
me when was that oh right.

Remember when they sawed Bill Palmer's leg off?
Diabetes did that **but go to Mexico**

And then the time I had that ankle sprain,
had to go to the emergency room --
behind the green curtain the unseen thing,
and the voices of the doctor and the nurse that side.
I overheard them talking Yes it'd be a blessing
old Tom he's been through a lot
The old man couldn't speak just squeal and moan
and shriek
but mostly squeal just like a little pig **but go to
Mexico**

if the doctor touched him ever so slightly the wrong way --

arthritis so bad that nothing could be moved,
and then a stroke reduced the man to this,
demented and unspeaking only pain.

But go to Mexico the time in eighth grade
when we visited the nursing home --

St. Patrick's day we took these green carnations
we had made out of tissue, passing them around
to all the white-sheeted wrecks in wheels chairs,
bed ridden skeletons, I got behind somehow
in our whirlwind cheery passage through the ward

But go to Mexico one woman prone in her white-sheeted bed

the sheet up to her neck, no movement and no speech,

but searching eyes seized on the pitiful piece of gimmickry --

the green, that pastel green, she wanted just to see it
but it had fallen down into some crevice in her sheet, she couldn't move.

I placed it nearer to her shoulder where she could look at it

no smile, but the hungry eyes searching my face then sideways

toward the single sprig of green, and then I left.

Yes, that's the way we almost all end up **But go to Mexico**

the drugs are there available, the open pharmacies,
humanity possesses its own death and hence its life
in Mexico, if nothing else, but go to Mexico.

There is a darkness. Space-Time
shaped around black asphalt.

Tunnel of driving, urine light cones
half burnt out street lights dimming
to milky gray with an amber spot,

rock of crack cocaine pipe stem of metal lamp post
the empty places in the cracks of the city.

Roach feelers of car headlights tickling
the empty skull of night. Dry riverbed of empty
road,

enormous gutter of the river bed itself,
the concrete gray like ashes in the moon's blue
light.

Something will happen here.

Booths of florescent beacons here and there
like shower stalls of dim blue light,
phone booth with receiver hanging from its cord
like a suicide, gas stations with enormous orange or
mint green letters

in cubes of light dusty with an electron haze of
spiraling moths

Something will happen here in these environs.

Moving closer to the lights that make a kind of
bracelet in the night far off

the alley ways with boarded brick warehouses,
parking areas with chain link fences topped with
spools of razor wire,

the newer warehouses of aluminum siding,
corrugated sides, white drainpipes like a huge
centipede stapled to the corner,

pagoda roofs in the blue full moon, abandoned
houses with dirt yards

and dogs chained out in front -- Dobermans,

Rotweilers -- motorcycles parked

in groups of four and five around the side
the liquor stores with metal bars on windows
spilling lemony light onto the sidewalk,

something will happen here.

The man is driving through, then the police
decide to pull him over at first a routine check

There is a gathering a few words very few get out
what's this it's nothing
where were you headed where where's that all right
get over here
who did he say that's bullshit look don't bullshit me
ok
I'm not you're who who's this your girlfriend hey
not bad
then at some moment a particular moment
but difficult to locate in one's memory,
a moment much like any other arriving passing
gone
not really ever there remembered and then not
But was there ever some one moment previous
when what was done might not have been ?
A moment then of time, of history --
a nightstick or the heavy long flashlight
was there a hand raised or an arm, a shout?
Movement, contagious movement, a flashing riot
baton another
The man is on the ground he has no weapon no
companions
he has nothing but the concrete he lies on
boots find the stomach ribs the head
the skull is certainly a fragile thing on concrete
at some point there is blood an astonishing amount
from forehead eyes mouth nose a deep gash above
the ear
The odd thing about being beaten up is this
it's often quite painless or rather pain is a complex
experience
it isn't the pain of a migraine or a screwed up back
you feel rather -- impact, a dull assault
you are aware of tearing jarring
you are enveloped in a haze of anger, fear, assault
which is a thing like insult yet with a visceral intent

a cutting ferocity, the sight of your own blood
enrages you
and yet the fear is almost paralyzing
you move so clumsily, stiffened, tensed with panic
you have greater strength and speed they say
and yet no mind or not enough
and no coordination timing, the strength
and speed themselves are not enough
your overwhelming rage will not prevail
They beat you up, you hit the ground, at some point
try to crawl away protect yourself they still keep on
there is a point blows to solar plexus rib cage
make it so that you can't breathe you vomit
the heel of a boot in the kidneys makes you wrench
backward
and then wrench in a different way there is a point
the skull is a fragile thing against concrete
There is something moving around here just under
the pavement,
the dying man must think, beyond the wall,
past the locked doors, within the shadows of the
buildings.
There is something in the rhythm and the colors
of the advertising signs, you think this as you're
driving past
weeks or months later, after all the news reports
There is something in the blank regard of policemen
as they look at you. It is the look of power,
which is, by nature, murderous, unless it is
restrained
to something else. When is the other not the other
but the self, or nearly so? When is it you there on
the pavement,
in the middle of the ring of polished boots,
in the midst of nightsticks flailing down,
when is it you there bleeding, when is it you

amid the tense aura of outrage, panic, hatred,
when is it you, you pass into the other's body
when the voice that they address you with is felt
inside your memory, yes, then you are part of them
in having them part of you, you pass into the other
when you look at them, their face their gestures,
their movements in the space between you both,
you pass into the other's body when they pass by
you,
there on the street, in the middle of the day,
they do not notice you, preoccupied, they make
their way
across the busy street, and you likewise preoccupied
have scarcely noticed them, and yet a
transformation
has occurred, a transubstantiation; the parking
meters,
stop signs, the cars and trucks, none of these things
becomes a part of you. But human bodies
merge in drawing near to each other,
they touch without touching, speak silently,
commune in mutual ignorance, shape and suppress
each other,
gather toward unapproachable communion,
warding irremediable contesting and contagion;
it is this way they are together, clothed with each
other,
naked constantly, inexhaustible, fragile, mortal.

II

And so in the gospel of Thomas, which is the
second life of fire,
the gospel of fire therefore, the inner surface of the
flame
and the outer covering too, the inner membrane
and the husk of the fire both must be consumed.
For there will come a time when you will seek this,
the power that it gives to you, you and those
arriving later,
when you will want this, need it very much
and what I have to say to you,
but when that time arrives, you will not find me
here.
So the expressed unfolds, there in the bookstore
the words flow all around you, passageways,
so long since anyone has spoken so,
all commerce now, of course; we know that,
still, there are those who, watching, listening,
access the inter-voice, the interceding
murmuring word flow. My words
were heard by the empty space above the lamp,
by the brown and twilight dimness of the room, the
stained
and blossomed paper covering its walls,
patterns formed by water seepage, fading rose
bouquets
that looked like places on an ancient map --
the world drawn crudely and with
a child-like effort at depiction, as opposed to
the true cartographer's mathesis -- the words
lost in the uncharted regions of the ceiling

where the smoke stream of my cigarette
made a kind of semi-visible and filmy scroll,
rolling up and up and up. And I
imagined, then, a moth, a large blue-violet moth,
the color of a morning glory, say,
of a kind I never actually have seen,
tropical perhaps, unreal, unavoidable --
the moth, the image of the naked soul
that in ecstatic, suicidal self-projection
drops straight into the deep worm hole of time
hidden in each instant, in each point of space, and
then
sucked through that narrow tube
is spewed out and into the next moment
of its dim and frenzied self-exploration
which then becomes at points, or at one point,
alignment with the fiery white anther of a candle,
always just one -- another turn, the hairpin bend
of space-time leading to other regions,
somewhere, yet not empty space --
then it was surprised again, stolen upon,
by the same white searing light. Another turn,
another...
(somewhere near an orchard which yet is far away
in the recollective hollow of a rain wet autumn
night,
phosphorous thumb print of the moon above,
slate blue lily pads of cloud). But then again
the candle's whitest burning -- until the final
correlation
reaches the tube-like and delicately pointed legs,
the pin points of the feet, pale yellow,
and the parchment-colored body
hairy as the anther of a flower,
the vascular webbing and linen gauze of the wings -
-

the moth at last matched up with the ultimate
and single point, beyond any conceivable geometry,
image of consummation drawing me
through the deep time hole, caught
in the helix of ascent amid wing ash,
the burning paper so thin, the thin-skinned
moth wing beatings of nocturnal light
focused in the burning glass of impact
with a candle flame. The lore of the Egyptians
gives to me seven selves, auras within and around
me,
seven eyes in the peacock tail spectrum of my fate,
seven cards in the hand held out into darkness.
The lore of the Egyptians gives to me seven cells
in the infinite honeycomb left
on the sands flushed in the iodine of sunset.

The lore of the Egyptians gives to me seven powers,
seven candles, small votive lights
held on the back of my outstretched arm
as I make my way through the tunnel of darkness,
night tunnel filled with empty desert winds
blown from the edges of the earth,
from well before the kingdoms of sand.
I know there are seven small candles
held out on the back of my arm outstretched,
dripping their hot wax onto my skin, tenacious
stings
of what are no longer bees, hot wax
sealing the gaps, the lacunae
of the written script of my flesh itself
before it is read out loud into the light, before
in the outcry of the light at daybreak
it can shout itself back, somewhere beyond the sun.
O when will it ever be read out loud in the light?
Or must it wait until the final severing

of light itself with the earth, in the darkness there
somewhere beyond the western lands?
Wind-tattered candlelight
in the dark tunnel of passageways -- the first candle,
the one that is nearest my heart
is called REN, the name that is secret.
I walk through the corridor, the candle
cutting out shapes in the night before me,
tossing them every which way.
The walls are concrete, the color of sand.
There is no light but the candle,
the corridor is like a well. I move downward
and downward, a bucket lowered slowly
to the starry surface of the sky. The wind out of
nowhere,
and the candle flame ripples, tattering,
then gone. Hands in the darkness
around me, moving over my body.
I feel the fingers on each, each finger
as though quite separately an intelligence.
Tall presences standing around in a circle
slowly, quickly narrowing to the space of my ribs,
their pressure against me as I breathe,
then further continuing pressure,
their open eye sockets like octagonal
cell holes in an empty hive. Their mouths --
but there is only one mouth, directly
opposite as I stare ahead
into the twisted knothole of a tree,
a gaping space crying upward in the midst
of the torturous wood grain,
flesh straining upward and screaming
from the roots in the dark infinitely far beneath me
and upward into the dark of the vertical well.
Angelic spirits inhabit the desert, and
the voices of women are present too,

yet in their voices there is
the seething of sea foam, bees of light
drawing the needle of honey through the eye of the
comb,
an infinite gallery of chambers hidden
in the crystal of a sand grain. The numerous
shades of darkness fill the octagonal cells
of night because of the voices of women.
They are setting a bed of sand and small mica
stones
next to the tiny ship I descry at the passageway's far
end.
Candle light streams on the model of wood
with its paper sails -- sea surf of white rose petals
flaking like eczema from the waves of the moon
sea,
from the plane of the desert
as it grows openly bright with bluish dawn.
Yet the walls of stone, of ivory and concrete
are still massed above me, around me.
I drift through the tunnels of silence and night
like a blood cell through the vessel of an eye.
And then forms, men of radiance and casual
devastation
clothed with the opals of fire and sunset,
spread wide the razors of holy light, icy and gold,
in the sands falling through the waist of the
hourglass,
there, where a thousand streaming serpents
climb the spilling apex of gold, the silt of sun
rivers.
The first of the candles, the first of the selves,
the one that is near to my wrist, held
on the back of my hand We were eating leaves
out in the backyard by the empty swimming pool
Yeah it's a thing we do sometimes

I don't know how we ever started drunk one night I
guess
got to be traditional so anyway lights the way to the
catacomb
where the vats are held, in the darkness the stair
steps
end the elevator shaft wind tunnel with its
descending
cable like the frenum of the column rising high into
the night
in the first jar the intestines the ant farm tunnel
and centipede peristalsis of blue green intestine
walls
Inside they were passing a pipe around
I never bother with it though had this great cocaine
and this stripper you wouldn't believe this chick we
know that human languages
are unique among animal signaling systems for they
combine
the relational meanings characteristic of mammal
languages
with the descriptive object orientation of insect
systems, and so
we may conclude that humans have a mammalian
and an insect neurology
combined as it were intertwining with each other
The story of Franklin as told in the Autobiography
is the story of technique, of actions upon other
actions.
Master a technique, and you will solve
the problem of your life. Not unfamiliar even now.
Shall we say it's the illustration of that tremendous
concept,
the machinic assemblage? Franklin is a body
without organs,
his two large puffy rolls float him down river;

he has an electrical plug attached to his navel. The
game board
that he lands on is the streets of Philadelphia
all laid out like a grid, in fact a grid,
radiant in winter light, burning in summer sun,
the purity of pure exchange is the greatest purity
The rules of the game are the Constitution the Bill
of Rights and sundry texts
of which more later. The idea of the game has
replaced the theatre.
The war continues but we do not see it
Text replaces torture or becomes itself a means
toward it,
torture continues though, of course,
although we do not go to it anymore.
The law is written on the body, true, yet
Edwards himself was really very deeply moved
looking straight ahead Although he had them
rolling in the aisles
His text the first American theatrical success
albeit designed for an invisible theatre
his vision of torment was the Hamletmachine of its
day
black box or tunnel created by a worm hole
through the piles of sacred texts the fallen leaves
so inquisition thus is every law
and yet all a kind of game a concept or rather
a conceptual technique expressed in a theatrum, an
inherent visibility
The Sadean vision is dispersed into the order of
these things themselves
And by a printing press a newspaper a someone
standing up to talk
This happens very fast, almost simultaneously
Edwards and Franklin are contemporaries
twisted as it were intertwining with each other

Where is the name of the beloved left? Carved into
stone,
or written in the sand that's glassed with waves,
or gouged into a tree The western clouds
are ranked in shoals, in flake-like strata,
low sunset clouds like shale blue stepping stones
float in an orange-pink light
they flow in low flat corrugations like structures of
rugose paper,
blue grey and smoke grey burning at its slowly
unraveling edge
In movement now continually the layers flow and
shift
or else they are a powder violet the sun burns
welding torch gold
metallic white at the edge the color of molten
aluminum
We have only stopped just now to watch,
yet the sun is low, the air already growing late,
not dimming yet, but quieter as though somehow
expectant
it's surprising that the sunset makes no sound
the evening has grown still, everything is silent.
Light changes just perceptibly in a wide slow arc
from the deepening succession of burnt yellow and
pea-green hills
in the distance to the north We stand here on a hill,
one of a series of waves rippling northward
toward the glacier-rubbed plateau and then to
Canada
The green and amber dusty golden land
hill after hill after hill is like a dark green carpet that
one shakes
in a slow wave before setting it in place
The earth turns silently, unfolding itself so slowly
underneath us

its geological formations shifting, flowing, floating
like the waves on a hidden sea. The unknown, the
unnoticed world,
the earth, is turning, yes, and yet we never feel it
For a moment we both think that we would like to
walk away,
to turn our backs, simply not to watch it for a while,
the overpowering light. And yet we can't.
How gradually its changes come and yet how
rapidly.
In a moment we are watching it again.
The sun is lower as though retreating past the far
edge of the world
like a player stepping out of bounds, dragging along
the night that comes in after it. Deep tide of stars,
luminous gold of cloud sand bars, burning strata,
pink and orange
violet and mauve, orange crossed with iodine and
molten brass,
the fan shaped veils suffused with a violet radiance,
floating weightless stepping stones
always darkening with their burning edges
as the islands drift and darken, the gathering of
night.
Black swallows crossing and re-crossing in their
realms of gold.
The earth is growing still, and quieter, settling.
Yet the colors will not cease or be less beautiful.
We're told it's chemicals that bring out
the luminous bright gold, intense unearthly pink,
a hellish visionary orange, poisonous colors
tint the undersides of blue gray clouds for miles.
The sunset's light is like a cone whose vanishing
point
is fixed somewhere beyond the distant char of hills,
beyond the poisoned atmosphere.

The light is dense, a medium. The cone of light is
more than light
but is the visible announcement of some horrifying
process,
unearthly and yet natural, expected.
The thought of men and angels adrift
within it as in a fluid medium,
of disembodied souls, is both more plausible and
yet more terrible --
adrift like motes of hay dust in a barn,
floating in the infinite depths of the sky.

III

And finally where do we conclude once
we have started to unravel all the tiny strings --
they really are quite small -- that make up
any given object? So in the light
that streams so dusty from the shaded lamp
I notice vibratory lines, like whiskers possibly,
and in the streaming of the sunrise
as it rays out over blue-black rooftops in the winter
light
are etched-in lines resembling the fur-like threads
that reach down through the structure of ice cubes,
ice threads of winter dawn that reach along

the surfaces of frozen space itself --
blue and violet cloud shoals,
lavender pink steam from a black chimney
rising straight in the still air of daybreak.
Yet this is only to repeat the phrase
that we had been provided with, that everything
without
is surely a within as well, or should one say instead?
Within what? you might ask. That's what I'd like to
know.
Here I am, a person in my prime of life,
successful in my career and everything
and still I have these moments when dream and
existence
smoothly interpenetrate. The office corridor at dusk,
the brick communications building
with its white aluminum electronic dish thing
on the roof, the dazzling purity and shimmer
of aluminum against the intense blue sky,
the way the row of ginko trees will rise up from the
pavement
in the purple dusk so eerily like a row of disheveled
women
coming toward you with some unavowable intent:
they must impart a message to you, a mysterious
one,
in secret, and must do so without your being
actually aware of it.
You feel this even as, laughing to yourself,
you walk on past their dry leaves rustling
like parchment streamers in the cool night air.
And yet how fast you've still outrun your fate,
that messenger running after you, sack of old
newspapers
on his back, cap in hand, waving to you -- hey there,
wait, slow down.

Messenger or newsboy? What difference does it make?

And yet you never do, or can. Slow down, that is, just like the rabbit or the tortoise or the -- who, then, is it now?

Some character. And what an odd, odd text it is, curiouiser and curiouiser -- the twilight, that is, as it fills

the empty public square with shadows lengthening, the buildings darkening to dense and lustrous cubes of glass and steel,

quaint cobblestones of the pedestrian maul,

glimmering stepping stones

just visible above a surface of total darkness.

What's down there? you might ask. Oh, you don't want to know.

The tortured are there, for one thing, in their cages, the place where all the evil and unlucky (is there a difference nowadays?)

have to go. But in the mirror of the twilight you can see these radiant and invisible figures, not yet erased, against the huge blackboard of empty space, a kind of theatre projection in a way,

as though you were a visitor from someplace else and this were being shown just for you, the hospitality of the place, as you might think of it. Where are you running though, still so fast, incessantly, to keep in place? And why not use your wings?

It's true you might get blown all around, end up somewhere in the future, or the past (let's say),

but there are ways of dealing with that sort of thing: the secret ring, the talisman, the inconspicuous tattoo,

these sometimes get you by, so that the guardians
will let you through the gate and into that other
time
you really wanted to inhabit all along.
Yes, you were asking me something, but I was
outside
and you were inside, or you were inside and I was
out,
I can't remember which, and now
I can't remember what the question was,
so that we always got our messages confused,
you there giving the signal to descend,
and I about to step off into space,
or you preparing yourself for all those g's
and I telling the operator: ok, so here we are.
Is anybody on this line right now?
That's what you really want to know,
as you set your foot out on the tightrope
stretched between the roofs -- down and down, oh
yes, way way down,
and no, no safety net at all, the janitors removed it.
Well, they were only doing as instructed.
But now it's you, just you. Just you. Look up:
your stomach rises to your throat, almost to your
eyes it seems;
your heart is pounding in the vertigo of blue blue
empty space...
how unbelievable it is. They say the stars will all
burn out
in about 10 billion years, and then
they'll all collapse into black holes
and things like that, then trillions of trillions
of trillions of years from now
even the particles of matter will disintegrate.
The end will be a thinnest spider mesh of radiation
and electrons

scattered across an inconceivably vast space,
a space so infinitely greater than what currently
exists --
is it really even accurate to call that space?
We probably should have another word, another
language rather,
but what would that amount to? This that I've just
told you
is perhaps the truth. You feel the idea as you
wobble there,
toes gripping the humming cord stretched taut
as cupid's bow string. And now you *are* the arrow
shot into the emptiness:
your knowledge is not knowledge, it is dream,
your desires, too, are dream; your fate is the enigma
darkness,
the universe in which it must be sealed darkness and
enigma too,
your thought, which is a dream
that strives and struggles to awaken from itself,
is rapt and tortured by this knowledge
which yet it does not, cannot have --
the fated emptiness, the heat death of the world,
the endless emptying of space. And yet these voices
still...
so many on the line oh my god he was hung you
wouldn't believe
Oh I knew. You did? Oh yeah, you know...
Michelle.
Her? Yeah. Oh really? Well, like...yeah. You didn't
say.
Well how was I supposed to know? I didn't even
know you were seeing him.
And what are all those little things down there? Oh
cars,

like little game pegs or something, no they're like
beads you stupid,
don't call me stupid, game pegs what the hell's a
game peg?
It's a peg that you use in a game yeah I got a peg
you can use,
shoved into their little slots or something yeah right
hey you got any more a that yeah it's right here hey
thanks no problem.
So that was the whole problem just right there,
you were always on the outside looking for me
and I was on the inside rummaging around for you.
What do you look like? I'm tall I'm blond
oh yeah I think we got someone like that
right here eh Charlie we got any tall blond ones
back there?
So at the very first signs, then, when you notice him
or her,
that glimmer in the midst of the still ordinary realm,
the passageways of buildings, corridors, hallways
and office cubicles,
when that remembered and desired face
has only just lately come forward from its hazy
ground
of dim light, forgotten music, the aura of
presentiment
with which the common things of day and night
disclose and veil themselves, the obliquities of
vision
deflected by desire and what defeats desire,
the burgeoning silence of the park light in the
afternoon,
the faces of the strangers in the dusk of the city
streets,
these fated to become your memory in that peculiar
and tenacious hold

by which we greet and say farewell to what is only,
finally, ourselves,
leave takings in the littering leaves of rain-wet
autumn nights,
before the final, unaccountable disappearance,
expected, desired, even striven for in a sense,
your name not left in any phone book any longer,
when the one desired has yet to take their place
right at the center of your life, but still somewhat
peripheral,
draws off a certain something from that center,
invades it with a sweet disturbance, a rustling
confusion
scattering small gifts -- the scent of something in a
drawer,
the gills of light that open in serrated blinds
casting incomparable glamour on a bed,
memories of their passage through a room -- then,
in that subtle self-division, you experience
an unexpected supplement as well,
an Other who is not the desired one, perhaps not
even a who,
a double rather -- male? female? neither? somehow
both?--
inhabiting the shadowy remainder
of your vividly multiplying inner life,
your radiant self-division. Who is this other,
haunting your perplexities,
the leaves of your insomnia, your book of many
nights?
An Other without name and without station,
a background figure surely, hidden always and yet
always seen.
And is it not the case that even within the seemingly
knowable totality of your body, the unforeseeable --

indeed, the impossible -- is present, raging, in a sense?

Was this not the lesson of Bergson and also of Schopenhauer?

Yet in that opening of light, the instant the interior is lured out of itself, or rather is defined in such a way, or, not defined but recognized as really no longer what it thought it was, it wakens to another unassimilable context, itself the unassimilated,

itself the unforeseen, the strangely anonymous shadow

darkening the surfaces of buildings in the trading district

which somehow only now we realize -- or are we only dreaming this?--

has spread out everywhere. Two impossible twin figures

walk these streets, that is to say the town's not big enough for both of them.

Which is the I and which, then, is the other?

Which is the word and which the echo of that word?

Which is the dreamer and which the existence dreamed?

How do I get out of here? you say.

We took a wrong turn somewhere back a ways.

But then in the evening when you take your little fix of heroin out into the yard there, that kind of rectangle in between the building where they keep the dumpster

and the neighbors didn't really seem to mind,

you always smoked it right up from the foil stuff's really really like really hey I hear I hear

like really yeah and the golden light is like a kind of chain link fence

descending amid space, and in that retrospective
twilight
and astonishment that always comes you see
yourself there
right behind that fence, your fingers hooked among
the radiant diamond pattern that it is,
the diamond back of space that sheds its skin
becoming still more space, infinity of depth so
depthless anyway
yet filled with infinite heartbreaking clarity.
You see the alpha and omega of the city.
It is here we must endure our lives,
attempt to find our happiness amid the leavings and
the refuse.
We ourselves are refuse, aren't we, after all?
Too cowardly to rise, rise up then Lazarus rise up,
rise up then unemployed downtrodden spat upon
rise up young people with no future, technical
training
at the commuter college employment at McDonalds
rise up but nothing happens, pigeons flocking in the
winter air,
billowing like an expanding net then settling
around the shoulders of the building opposite.
You hear the traffic from the street. Someone is
calling someone.
They really need to paint that door, gray paint all
peeling off in flakes.
The door grows brown and floats in the dirty tap
water of dusk.
And then it's night, you close your eyes and sleep,
you wake up and it's morning, the television's
there.
Hey television, how are ya? blue square a kind of
light portal
in the grey dimness of the room.

She tacked up those old horse blankets or something
over the windows, the light is brownish green
around the edges.

Dark still. Car horns fewer in the street, not very
few,

the rhythms different though, or something.

Apartment's really cold.

Get up. The heater's like a piece of cold porch
railing, nothing there at all.

Get coffee. Got to get to work. Heroin makes me
constipated,

but I always take a ton of that senna stuff so in the
can we go

ahh shit the whole damn thing away,

that would be something wouldn't it,

shit out all your problems, what if we could just
get rid of all the scum that's fucking up this fucking
society

the jews the niggers all these fucking wop scumbags
ccny was a decent college I taught there many
years,

but when they started letting in just anyone,
these working class Italians were the worst,
the standards became abysmal.

After I put out my book on coprophagia and the
new world order

I just simply left no no well yes of course he did he
did that's right

and then Clifford talked to me about that position at
Brown

I wasn't really interested, the dean was nice,

I think Martin used to...see her, as it were.

I think he was on her committee, actually.

Yes, we were reversible, the counterparts
fate had allotted us. This street, these buildings,
hallways, corridors.

the map of the city was a cryptogram,
our hand was pressed straight onto it.
We were imprinted with its currency, bill after bill
after bill,
the sepia and green, the vague masonic pyramid,
the eye in my hand that guides my hand,
the other eye that watches it while it does.
My skin peeled off like the skin of those
unfortunates confined to “the pond”
in wherever that place was. I couldn’t see to drive.
The highway was the highway of the damned,
libidinal freeway they called it. Traffic signs drifted
into the dim fishbowl of the windscreen
as the night englobed itself around us,
the landscape floated slightly upward as we sank
into the endlessness and secrecy of the road,
becoming smaller and smaller in the opening mouth
of the continent.
Where is the friend, you ask. Oh friend, there is no
friend.

IV

But once you get behind a person’s face,
it isn’t really them that’s there,
it’s childhood, not theirs of course, but anyone’s.
Then when you lit the candles in the curtained
room,

playing that special game that you'd made up,
the stranger from next door was there,
(visiting at odd seasons, every now and then.)
It rained so hard that day, then hail came down,
the hard white grains, the size of corn kernels, gray
and white,
prefigurations of the days to come. So wonderful
to turn back to such moments, in the depths of later
time,
looking up at them, as though from shadowed
fissures.
How have you fallen here, so barren, stark, and
cold,
remote from anyone? But then it was all different --
light and warmth, and that beguiling secrecy
that always attends happiness. Yes, all was different
then,
as the two of you huddled underneath
the blanket kept for just those times, the pattern that
it had,
blue sailboats against a pure white ground.
Holding it up above your heads, the flashlight there
between you
(which one was holding it?) like a huge erect thing
in the dark, the rudder on a boat, let's say,
you showed each other the cards you liked the most,
each of you drawing one card from the deck, eyes
closed,
then peering outside the little tent-like arrangement
only to savor the look and feel of things --
the ring of white candles in the high, wainscoted,
draughty room.
Where had they gone? Yes, adults were far away.
The two of you, the rain outside, the wind,
the flickering and festive light, that was all there
was.

Those were les beaux jours certainly. But where did they all go?

Now it's just arrangements on the internet.

Maybe some phone sex now and then,

I am a full-figured woman looking to fulfill my desires

as a devoted slave to a strict but caring master.

And then the scholar of something at the university of somewhere

explaining the benefits of circumcision

(second time I've mentioned it I know, third time even, fourth maybe)

while waiting in that long line at the bank --

cute tellers -- and yet still finding time to take time out

for just that special someone. Why is it

that they bleed pigs when they slaughter them?

Does a man resemble a pig at all, do you think?

And yes I am incorrigible, am I not?

And yet you've known that all along.

Six inches, very curved, "banana" as they say,

thick toward the base but tapering quite a lot,

I am a divorced Caucasian gentleman, fun loving,

looking to fulfill my here there is a blank spot in the manuscript.

It's full of splotches, there are dark unsightly stains,

And then the deeper fissures full of prurient ____

Termites and pockets of gray matter,

pustules and green stringy mucous

gathering in clotted webs and hairy spongy nests.

There is a bandage over the face, it would appear.

The mouth moves slowly, and a grommet has been punched into the throat.

It was his own fault, you know, he'd corner one of them,

get her panties off her, roll them up in newspaper

then smoke the god damn thing, lighting it with
barbecue fluid.

It was strange. Yeah he was weird, there's no
question about it.

Well this is what happens. Yep, make your own bed
and lay in it.

Then peeling away the second coat of time,
you run into that person once again, and is it really
them?

Would they possibly remember, it's been so long.
They do though, naturally, at least you think they
do.

For, true, you never do converse,
don't actually see each other face to face,
you sort of do, but not exactly,
you know the kind of thing I mean,
it's a mood thing more than anything,
kind of an atmosphere, an assemblage you might
say.

You have it there between you. Yes, they did
acknowledge --

Did you see that gesture? just that faint, faint smile?

Or perhaps it was that brief look of alarm.

And that was how you knew. Henceforth,
you visit the construction site each evening.

Sometimes you have to wait so long.

The moon is a blue-green puddle of oil
in the black metallic road. Or is that the reflection in
a puddle?

Silvery oil slick of sky, a crane is looming like a
shorn mantis.

There are all these trucks around.

Her face is drained white in the moon.

She gets down on her knees, you didn't ask for this,
but she insists, and she exhibits then her seven
secret wounds:

The first one on the right side near the occiput,
the second on her tongue, the third is purely
conceptual
though no less real, the forth is on the inside of her
left eyelid,
the fifth is there, beneath your foot,
(thus comes her posture of abasement,
before the column she desires you to be,
the most high to her own interiority, the obverse
of her own opening and closing nakedness,
(this is her sixth wound)),
the seventh and the last, her pullulating womb,
no longer in her abdomen but hidden like a secret
script,
like a phylactery, yet underneath her arm.
She opens up your pants, you make her stand.
For some reason she is crying, no, she will not say
why.
And then she does: because of all the animals, she
says.
It was this that they were trying to explain,
and yet we haven't learned it, not even just barely
learned.
It was this that they were dying for, to pass it on to
us,
their agony, their dim complex awareness,
their avowals, their dimensions. So you descend
with her
into the mine shaft: the honeycomb
extends outward all around you, upward
far into the heights of depth, downward and down
into unthought-of realms, the agencies
and motivating oracles, heard and yet not seen,
vibrations felt through papery thin walls. There,
in the central courtyard, the ecstatic one
is joined with who must be the other one you knew

way back when you saw his face on that box
of breakfast cereal. It's true, she came to you
in a dream one night, then you slept with her a few
times
back in grad school, yes it's really her.
You'd wondered what had happened to her after all.
She got a job out somewhere and then
developed multiple sclerosis in her forties.
Don't you remember? you were on the plane,
going to give your lecture at Bryn Mawr
(Aristotle again?) And it was shortly after you'd
received
the notice of her suicide, yes from what's-his-name.
Yes that's right. But now she's made of glass.
Her head is like a hive itself -- octagonal shot gun
barrels
stare back from both her eyes, there are
workers rising and descending, up and up
and down and down, along her spine.
Fields of wild clover and alfalfa are her breasts.
Her abdomen is like a warm haystack.
Her numerous men, her bachelors,
are shadows spilling from around her legs like
skirts.
But it was always just before the rain would stop.
And hidden there still in your private darkness
shared
You'd wonder to each other what makes a human
being, after all.
It was not something that you said, you never
spoke,
the girl herself was mute and deathly afraid, for
some odd reason,
of the television set. We never had it on much.
It must have been the way the dark green screen
reflected her animality back to her,

as though it were the surface of deep water.
It is the surface of deep water after all
that's frightening, and fascinating too. So therefore
it was just the two of you, the secret friends.
You'd see her in the mirror there sometimes
where she had gotten terribly entangled:
the autism of reflection is a lovely
and yet a multiplying fate. And that was it,
that specialness, the tremulous precision
somewhere in the candlelight, the motioned
darkness in itself,
not the eternal darkness, but the motivation for
grasping,
the look, the hand outstretched, the finger tips
before they touch the waiting skin, which feels the
touch already
in anticipating it. And so it was she made her
presence a familiar
and yet captivating thing. She was held captive by it
too,
her features forming there beneath the coverlet.
It was here the unconditioned
opened up around the human face,
the gaze that watched us in that aureate and
illuminated time --
the clamoring of earliness, even that not yet
arrived,
(so heartbreaking to think there really was a time,
a place like that). The Other was the Self,
you knew this then, whatever else you knew;
the other was internal to the self, the inter-voice,
the knowledge of the other was the thing outside,
the passageway, the burnt wick of relation
was the rope you had to climb. The smoke breath
led you up into the opening sublimity,

the infinitely speaking silent, the absolutely silent
spoken still.

Then there was love which never more could cease.
It was then you knew the desolation of humanity,
then in your special irreplaceable dimension,
lost time of youth. Yet do we really need it?
Humanity, that is. Why not pass on to something
else?

retaining human form, of course,
(nobody wants to fuck a machine)
but handling it all quite differently. Well first
you've always got to have your credit cards, that's
one thing.

Then another is a really good hair cutter --
irreplaceable, she's worth she's worth she is worth
her weight in gold

I know I'm serious I know but Renee you've got to
get this guy like out of your life ok

Yeah yeah yeah don't yeah me look I'm doing
what I want all right

Don't start talking to me look ma just and if your
father finds out you're seeing one of them look out
I'm telling you the other thing, the second
horizon of the new found world is drugs.

Yes, pharmacology is where it's at. The internet,
that's third.

It'll be passe before too long, of course.

And I really think iambic pentameter is making a
big comeback,

And rhyme also, and plays in verse -- forsooth.

(Hey how'm I doin' John? Could you have written
that?)

I don't think so. And what about that real pretty part
about just starting to get a crush on someone and all
that?

You couldn't have done that. Don't fuck me around
man,
I'm telling you. (I stole it from Foucault actually.))
Yeah fuck him, he's dead, dead faggot, I hope all
faggots get AIDS
and fucking die that's what I hope I fucking hate
them
I hate them they make me fucking sick I hate the
bastards
and these jew bastard doctors fucking making up
all these drugs
and cures and shit just let the fuckers fucking die
that's what I fucking say fuck them
you know tax payer money going to these pansy ass
bastards
running around sticking their dicks in each other left
and right
it's what they fucking deserve.
Then to be lured out by desire, this desire
you feel for another, which throbs in you like a
bruise,
the desire for a woman, one woman in particular.
You see her every day, the daily excitement and
anxiety,
it seems absurd somehow, and yet how willingly
you submit to it. Still, there is the question,
do you want it really? And always there's a voice
somewhere suggesting an alternative.
You feel the trouble of the world
like a steady pressure in your head: the world is
nothing
but a labyrinth, and there is no way out.
Day by day you have no choice but to submit to it,
this the wearisome crush of people,
with their glances, their insidious questionings
that seem to encompass you at times

in a vivid aura of innumerable judgments
-- approving, disapproving -- brought down against
you
in any haphazard group, the doors of substance
opening, then closed; the calculated hostility and
violence of money,
the rules of the world, of the fallen world itself;
the horrible union of the body and the spirit,
the unperceived disjunctions between the spirit and
the mind.
Bewilderment in the darkest maze, loneliness in
part,
mere loneliness, which yet destroys you from
within.
In the middle of all this, like a match flaring,
you feel the desire for this other. And so
you submit to the entire history once more,
wondering
if you have a choice. Do you really want the whole
thing yet again?
Since the desire for this other is a desire for your
life itself
in all its compromised associations
that team and jar like choruses of rumor piling up
and piling up,
filling the empty spaces of the twilight public
square
where at evening in the slanted copper light you
walk home by yourself
once again to your empty apartment. Do you still
want,
can you still tolerate the desire of your sexuality,
which it seems so strange now still to have,
the substance of your life, this life?
Always there is this asking over and over in the
curtained room,

is it I? Is this my only existence? Where is the other
I was promised long ago somewhere?
And yet the world can be only what it is.
A morning ritual. The movement of the body
like a diffused pulse, rhythmic, steady, a gathering
of images,
as of a word about to come, or a drop of water
hanging at the faucet's lip.
The organ of utterance is not merely the tongue.
Yet the power of utterance searches outward
to gather around an I, a center. The hand, though,
is strangely separate. My legs feel very distant
as though only the most tenuous thread
connected them with my fixed, searching gaze,
lapsing toward indifference, now and then.
Now the rhythm of the body is a steadier and louder
pulse
ascending by way of intervals, each interval
an increase of concentration, a slightly higher pitch.
And her sounds, her breathing, her movements,
just ever so slightly not my own -- not my own
by the small interval of absence,
as though my body were held, now,
by the images in the light fanned out across the
ceiling
in a scalloped aura tinted by the color of the
curtains,
where the intent gaze must seek her,
and where it yet finds nothing. What are you
as you search the rhythms of the passing self,
like a piece of music improvised and listened to
through a wall, your ear placed
to the thin partition of your body
which separates you from yourself, as well
as from the other, as the moment arrives
and light is spoken in its word,

as the word is spoken in its breath, as the gathering
utterance is found, then lost,
spasming and dying in the grasp,
melting to a mere wetness like melting snow?
In the woman you meet in the bar early one
evening
you find the repetition of what you had encountered
otherwise,
in waking dreams, and then at night, in sleep,
in fantasy too and yet also in
your philosophical reading. Yes, she has just
returned
from a bus trip across the country.
She went to New York City to visit someone -- a
minor poet
of whom you've heard but whose work you've
never read.
She says that she's in love with him
and yet refuses to talk about her time there.
You realize, after she orders another drink,
that she's completely drunk, and yet
that was the first thing she had said to you,
that she was drunk, so drunk, wasted, she had said.
She is wearing a red dress made of imitation silk,
her body is shapeless, sack-like, inside of it,
and yet her legs are slim and youthful still.
You notice that she smells of sweat;
she asks about the book you're reading
and then seems overjoyed
when you tell her it's philosophy.
She beams, touches your arm and says that she too
has studied philosophy, she writes poetry and offers
to recite one of her poems but then can't remember
more than the first few lines, which are banal.
She says repeatedly that she's so glad to meet you,
touching your arm again each time,

and as she does her gaze meets yours more
frequently,
after a few minutes she says
that she would like to have a relationship with you
and asks you to take her back to your apartment.
You realize how true it is, as Lyotard has observed,
that the libido never fails to invest regions,
and not under the rubric of lack and appropriation,
but without reserve. It invests without condition.
For condition is rule and knowledge
and desire knows nothing of rules
and is not concerned with knowledge,
it wants only the object of its desire,
unconditionally,
absolutely, and without reserve; history
is meaningless for it, and time is merely the medium
in which it unfolds like a great flower toward its
objective,
time is its sunlight and the depths of the self
its fertile darkness, and yet how true it is
that depths are unheard of here, that all
is surface effect. You see this very clearly
amid the erratic gestures and incoherent
wandering observations of an unhinged
and desperate mind, as out of the meandering
gaze there comes forth the laser of desire focused
with strange precision, out of stray disconnected
thoughts
and disjointed impulses and blurred, vague memory,
there rises yet this specific injunction -- take me,
use me.

V

The light's held back in dense striations
behind sand colored plastic blinds. The wooden fan
blades
pass around in steady slicings, cutting the room
with shadows.
You'd think by now they would have fallen
through,
like everything else here, the walls I guess,
or space, or something, but they haven't. Well my
my....
I heard Chet Baker on the radio last night.
I didn't know he sang. I thought it was a woman,
actually.
I fall in love too easily. I should know by now.
I think that's what it was. So memorable, beautiful
really,
and the finest thing of all was given to me
afterwards,
when they said that it was him, and I really could
have sworn
it was a female singer, some sultry dim chanteuse.
And yet it was a man, and this was what was
beautiful
about the whole affair -- oh, should I call it that?
And I do fall in love too easily myself. There's this
little doll
I see around town all the time. I know she's way too
young for me,

gives me that frightened faun look they sometimes
have
when confronted with an older man. I'm really not
that old,
but then I guess to her I might...well anyway,
yes that not being able to really tell was it,
that absolute not knowing, that having been
mistaken
in such a fundamental way. A woman was a man.
Or was it just a voice there, either way?
Is a voice male or female, when you analyze it?
The invisible infinity, pure light of voice, what is
more perfect,
more at home in being elsewhere, more calling
toward an altered dedication, a new life?
Where there is voice the light fills inward gathered
to itself
in presence summoning the powers of the world --
time and passage, truth and its simulacra,
multiplicity and union, which yet is not the simple
or the One, the burning singularity of light
multiplies itself in its simplicity, opening the planes
of space,
the deserts and the mountains, blue rivers and green
fields,
of the endless and uncounted, the unforeseeable,
the still unknown -- how can we call it earth,
a word too emptied of all meaning -- the-given-by-
the-light.
Yet what is given by the light is given by the voice.
It is only in that summoning to cross an emptiness,
the summons to the outside, toward the other,
that light becomes the thing we know as light,
becomes the power of our knowledge, of all
conceivable knowledge, the power of the true and
of the false.

I think I'm going to kill myself after this poem is done.

There's no telling, of course, how long it might go on.

I'm simply not needed in this place. It's really not a question of time --

the needy, empty time -- I really don't believe in that.

But rather one of place. It was only by an historical mistake

I got here after all. An historical mistake is an irremediable mistake. That means it can't be fixed.

What I'm going to do is travel down to Mexico, find one of those pharmacies, buy a bunch of pills, check into a motel

and take a massive overdose. It seem like the best way.

I don't know why everybody doesn't do that.

Unless what I've read on the internet's all fake about pharmacies

being all open there, just go in and get whatever you want ,

cash and carry, no questions asked. Of course, if everybody did like that, then what?

I suppose you have me there, but only by the balls, and I don't really need them anyway. But one thing I can see

is where the government (of Mexico, that is) would start to get annoyed --

all these Yankees streaming down to off themselves in seedy little rooms in Tijuana or Juarez.

Maybe I'd pick Cancun (well what the hell).

The maids would probably revolt, having to clean up all that yanqie shit and vomit

and whatever, but I don't know, they're kind of
used to all of that,
in a way, business as usual, I suppose, is how you
might think of it.

I was pursuing my own special project though, you
see.

It was the machinic assemblage once again,
avant la lettre, and in my own peculiar way.

No I didn't get laid that much, that's true,
but that was actually part of the whole plan,
if you can believe that. But really I'm serious,
and everybody has their own peculiarities I guess.
But then when I had to write my name on all those
dotted lines

(I said that once before -- sorry) and the libidinal
economy thing

began to get -- somehow it was really an extreme
case

I guess you'd have to say, as when the light
is filtered through two panes of glass at once,
the blinds a kind of armor against further light.

I was beginning to theorize there'd never be
an end, an outside to all this, and then one came
along,

and I just simply stopped , but then if you decide
at some particular point that, yes, you're simply
going to slide back

into the darkness you came out of, into the sphere of
water,

the enclosed continuum, the walls that rise above
into the daytime sky, dark walls of shadow
structures, even in the middle of the hectic urban
day,

will suddenly become a waiting thing, accepting
what you have to offer it, there where the sky
cracks though into the canyons of the lost.

And in the moonlight when you make your way
out of the filmy sack where you had hung
suspended in the branches of a tree, dark eyes
of the forest clustering so near, you see the
moonlight
touching the blue clouds like milk poured in a
stream.

You feel its tingling presence on your face and hair.
The moth girl meets you in the gateway of the tree,
the night is filled with rivers flowing
and with threads and nets of shadows tackling
the earth, grappling it tight in fractal patterns
on the dust gray street, the fountains are asleep
inside of you,
the wells are listening where your voice calls down,
your tongue descends into the honey's cubicle,
the radiant ringing voices, the shadow workers,
gather themselves around and onto it
like ants adhering to an anteater's tongue.
Your speech is full of secrets of the underworld
from this night forward, and yet, still, everything is
known.

You've always sought out insect knowledge
anyway: the beetle's mandible, the spider's
creativity,
the aphid's startling leap. Yes, it is yours, the
human
is just one thing on the earth. You try to think it
as it might have been. There was a turning and
perversion.

Sometime, somewhere. You must have heard
reports.

You've seen the evidence, it's somewhere in the
suburbs
skimming along the surfaces of night, but then there
was

the question of the underground, the voices
humming
in the telephone, secret directives given from
electric plugs, the info leaking everywhere. Soon all
is either encrypted or entirely itself or both.
The eels, though, are swarming just behind my face.
I see them when I look into the water on a cloudy
day,
the eels are disturbing me inside, they've become
part of me.
I crave the dark, the muddy pools. Where is my
flesh to bite?
The surface of the moon is where the scorpion
has hidden his bright other face, the one he never
wears.
Yet in the vertigo of darkness underneath the tree
the underbelly of the scorpion is visible,
the legs move in the wind, the leaves
are aphids sleeping in their lunar baths,
they sometimes fall asleep like that, the blue moles
down underneath among the tree roots let the water
out,
it runs down from the cup, the blank sundial
stares into the ticking night, the huge roots of the
tree
are like a heart torn open from a chest,
the arteries still beating, root systems throbbing
upward and up into the fountain of tree space.
How to describe the night unless you are part of it,
and yet how to describe it if you are.
The naked body suddenly disrobed
is a startling experience, doubly, triply so
in the darkness of the room. You see her suddenly
against the emptiness, she stands forth from it
in a candor, an ecstatic wondering, which is your
gaze itself.

And yes, you know quite clearly then
it's really only you who feels this way,
which is a strange thing after all, that one should
want the other so much more, devastation, when
you think of it,
never yourself to be desired with that intensity.
So many differences, this difference, echo, in the
empty room,
in the sheer transcendence of alterity which is this
space,
the language turning, turning now in its own
twilight,
neither a darkness nor a radiance, but a sound,
and, falling in between the syllables,
falling among the empty chains, there is the silence
of your life.

AFTERWORD

Encounters With the Author in Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had occasion to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any which remains merely language, merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

A cliché?

Yes or not even a cliché but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the

enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

Do you consider yourself a political writer?

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would

seem.

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

What sorts of things are you working on currently?

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

There are many other things to talk about, but perhaps that's a good note to end on for now. But what were you trying to do in this poem in particular?

Obviously it was influenced stylistically by Ashbery. But I think it is a bit more surreal. It is the third poem in a trilogy.

About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*.

About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2008 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.

